

CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2008

WILLIAM A. BRIGGS BUILDING (REED CONFERENCE ROOM)

845 PARK AVENUE

EXECUTIVE SESSION: 5:00 P.M.

PUBLIC WORK SESSION: 6:00 P.M.

**PUBLIC MEETING: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING PUBLIC WORK
SESSION**

MINUTES

A special meeting and work session of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at the William A. Briggs Building in the Reed Conference Room with the following members present: Mr. Archetto (arrived at 5:28 p.m.), Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Lombardi (arrived at 6:39 p.m.), Mr. Stycos, Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway, and Mr. Traficante. Mrs. Greifer was absent. Also present were Mr. Scherza, Mr. Nero, Mr. Balducci, Mr. Nero, Dr. Lundsten, and Mrs. Coogan.

Chairman Traficante called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. It was moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mr. Stycos and unanimously carried that the members adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Laws PL 42-46-5(a)(1) Personnel (PBGR Process); PL 42-46-5(a)(2) Collective Bargaining and Litigation (Breakfast Distribution) (Contract Negotiations' Update); Caruolo Action.

Chairman Traficante convened the work session at 6:30 p.m.

I. Work Session Agenda:

1. PBGR Process

For the benefit of the public, PBGR means Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements. Mr. Nero noted that he asked Mr. Kelly, principal of Cranston High School East, and Mr. Knowlton, Principal of Cranston High School West, to attend this work session. He indicated that the district is in trouble in the area of the PBGR's. There are five institutions in Cranston, East and West, the Charter School, the Sanders Program, and the AEP Program; and all of those programs produce graduates. Supposedly by the year 2010, the students have to graduate from high school with a regents' approved diploma. Twice the work that the district has done on the diploma has come back, and they are not satisfied with the work. By law the district should have a PBGR coordinator, and this district does not have a PBGR coordinator. The work they have to do could be given to the administrators in the high schools, but he told the committee right now the district is down one assistant principal in both high schools; and the bulk of the work is being picked up by everyone else in the schools; so they are not in a position to do that. These are supposed to be full-time positions, and the district doesn't have them. Other districts do have a PBGR coordinator. This district has

difficulty in three areas which is correctly mapping the GSE's to the curriculum; correctly aligning and mapping the assessments to the GSE's; and developing common tasks and rubric development.

Mr. Nero went on to explain to the committee that this district is in corrective action for one area which is mathematics at the high schools in the area of special education where it fails to make annual yearly progress, AYP. He also has going out to the Department of Education five pages of what the district has done and the resources employed for the district to get out of corrective action. It is extensive, and the five institutions of learning are working hard to accomplish this. He explained further that administration will be approaching the unions first; a copy was sent to the Cranston Teachers' Alliance, asking them for concessions on time. He told the committee that the district is in need of significant professional development for the staff. In discussions with Attorney Ben Scungio, unless the district obtains a Regent's approved diploma, administration would have to put a lock on the district. All the work that is done K to 8 will not help in terms of what they will need to do in the high school areas. They are working on it and have brought in a consultant, Peg Ventetuoli Ferreira. Administration has been able to take some money out of the high school accounts.

Mr. Nero added that since the district cut a position he has taken on the work of the PBGR's in addition to all the other duties all the administrators have. Everyone is trying to do the best job they can in order to get a Regent's approved diploma.

Mr. Nero asked the principals to discuss with the committee the issues they are facing and what they have been doing with their professional development with Peg Ventetuoli, the consultant, since the beginning of the year. Mr. Knowlton indicated that Peg Vetetuoli was recommended by the Department of Education as one who knows her stuff pretty well. She is the former principal of Mount Hope High School which was a high school that was low performing for several years. When she took over as principal and began implementing some of the things that she is recommending that Cranston do, she had a drastic change in her scores. She did a presentation at Cranston West yesterday in which she showed the six or seven-year improvement in all of their scores across the board after she implemented many of the things that she is recommending for Cranston to work toward their high school diploma being accepted by RIDE. His school has had several planning meetings with Peg. They have a district wide PBGR committee that has discussed with her a plan of action. He, Mr. Kelly, and a small group of administrators have worked with her to plan on how they go about doing this. They have done this on several occasions. Peg did an overview of what the school's problems are and where they need to go. She presented it to Cranston East in November, and she

presented it to Cranston West yesterday. Their plan from hereon in is to meet with Peg later on in the week to further plan their course of action. At West they are planning on having a review of her presentation at their next faculty meeting in order to have an open discussion on their impression of what she is presenting. The following week they will break up and have more in depth discussions on the plan and

Page 3 December 9, 2008

how they can move it forward. They also have a meeting scheduled in January which is going to be a meeting bringing back the same group of attendees who attended the meeting on October 17th with administrators and department heads from both East and West but first look at the overview that Peg did at Mount Hope High School and Central Falls High School where she assisted them as well. They will revisit with that group everything that has happened since that time with the faculty in terms of discussion. They are hoping by that time that they will have some sense of what they have in terms of time.

Mr. Traficante asked if all the schools would be invited to the same meeting, and Mr. Nero responded that when the Sanders Academy Program and the AEP Program students do their presentation of their portfolio, they do it at their school of record which is their home school. The AEP students will do it at the Charter School, and the Sanders Academy Program students branch out and do their

presentations at East or West. He noted to the committee that they will note in his correspondence to Dr. Roy Seitsinger that he included all five schools whenever he is talking about the issue of the diploma.

All schools are invited to these sessions. These group meetings are being done without any cost to the district. It is being carved out of office assignments. Mr. Dennis Ratcliffe from the Legion Post allows the district to use the Post free of charge. They have held all-day sessions in that building.

Mr. Lombardi joined the work session at 6:39 p.m.

Mr. Kelly, principal of Cranston High School West, indicated that they had the same presentation done one month prior. They are now in the process of trying to digest all the information. His departments are working hard in the one-hour department meetings that are held in terms of trying to begin the development of the assessment piece in aligning the GSE's and those types of pieces. With having one hour a month, there is no continuity in terms of what they are doing. With regard to the new NEASC regulations, they will be re-authorized and will come out in 2011. The work that is being done has gone from seventy-four pieces down to fifty-three and has come in line with the high school reform initiatives. A lot of the language and topics are the same along with the topics. When they look at their school and expectations and their mission and what they have to do with NEASC, it is directly in line with what they are doing with the high school reform process.

Mr. Nero stated categorically that this is not the fault of the administrators, and certainly it is not the fault of the teachers who are working wholeheartedly in this process for a couple of years. Administration would love to have as is required by law a full-time person be in charge of this program. Mr. Seitsinger has met with him and Mr. Scherza twice, and he has been very good to the district. There may have to be a resolution coming forward from the new committee members asking for a waiver of three to four schools because this is what most school districts did when they did it the first time

Page 4 December 9, 2008

around. Cranston doesn't have those provisions built into their contract, but they did a time out. Cranston will need at least three days to do the real nuts and bolts work to dig down deep to align everything. No one wants to miss any school, but he has said a million times that students could go to school for 200 or 220 days, but unless they align the GSE's in the area of mathematics, unless they get the special education students starting in the 9th grade and the regular education students that no one will be without algebra before they get to the 10th grade; and everyone will have geometry; and unless the district has very tough standards and align them, a teacher can teach all day long, it is the fact that the district must align this and develop common tasks in the rubrics that go along with this.

The next committee may be facing this in January after they are sworn in.

Mr. Traficante referred to the packets that the AEP students work with and noted that those packets are not aligned. Mr. Nero responded that they are working on this.

2. ESL Desk Audit and Review of New ESL Regulations

Dr. Lundsten indicated to the committee that they received in their packet a copy of the desk audit that the district was required to submit to RIDE regarding the English Language Learners Program. It listed the regulations and whether or not the district was meeting those regulations with a “Y” or an “N”. They adopted new regulations which were distributed to the committee. She wished to explain to the committee those areas where the district was not in compliance for English Language Learners based on these regulations. She noted that Cranston is a high incident district with over 150 English language learners in the K through 12 program. It is important to know this because some of the requirements hinge on high incident. Dr. Lundsten continued to go through the report and explained that the district is required by regulation to have a full-time administrator, who is certified as an English Language Learner or ESL on the staff, and it does not; the district is not in compliance. Prior to this year, the district had a certified ESL teacher as a

coordinator who was a program supervisor. If this desk audit was done for the last school year when they had the program supervisor position in place, many of the “N’s” would have been “Y’s.” This year because the district doesn’t have either person, it is not in compliance. This desk audit is the first step in looking at the program. This year the Office of Diverse Learners at RIDE is going to visit three districts; Cranston is not one of them. This audit is the only item to be submitted this year and will have to submit it again next year. She suspects that next year Cranston may be on their list much like the school support team who visits for special education. They will do the same for English Language Learners, and then they will submit a report and the district will then have to put an action plan in place. She told the committee that they needed to be aware that the district is not in compliance with certain parts of these regulations.

Page 5 December 9, 2008

Dr. Lundsten went on to say that the district is not in compliance that they do not have an ELL coordinator. This is a second person which is required in a high incident district. In addition, they want a person who deals directly with the community.

Mrs. Lundsten referred to page 8 of the regulations which states that the district should have sufficient personnel and resources to

effectively run the program. In some of the buildings, the district is right where it needs to be. In other buildings, they are not where they need to be with regard to that piece of the regulations. At Bain, it needs two full-time people, and there is only one full-time person in that building. She is being spread between the two grades. That is another area where the district is non-compliant.

Dr. Lundsten referred to page 10 of the audit for the time requirement. She noted that there are different levels at which ESL students enter into the program based on their language needs. At the entering or beginning levels, it requires three periods or the equivalent of three periods of instruction a day. At the next level, they need two periods; and the next level one is required. In some of the district's programs, they are not meeting the three levels because there aren't enough personnel in addition to the scheduling issues around that.

With regard to class size, they are all right at this time. She noted that there are specific regulations for personnel on page 11. For professional development, the district doesn't have a coordinator or a professional development person. This year the district is not fulfilling the requirement in making sure all staff has the appropriate professional development. In addition, there is no Advisory Committee which was facilitated by the program coordinator. Dr. Lundsten noted that it is not all doom and gloom. There are many yeses on the audit. She mentioned about the home language survey that must be in dual languages. The district has some of the

languages but not all of the languages.

Kristen Hlady, assistant principal at Bain, indicated that the State is putting together standardized documents that will be used in the entire state for multiple languages. Most districts do not have them for every language in their community. Dr. Lundsten added that although the district does not have a program coordinator Kristen Hlady has graciously agreed to be the district's contact person. There is a monthly meeting at the state level for districts that have ELL students in it. If she is not available, she will attend the meetings.

Superintendent Scherza noted that if this district had this audit done last year or the year before, it would have been in almost complete compliance. It is a matter of dollars and cents; many things have been cut out. In working with the attorneys for the district, he, Mrs. Lundsten, and Mr. Nero met with the deputy commissioner. They have gone through all the regulations supplied by the Department of Education legal counsel. They have gone through item by item and line by line asking for waivers or

Page 6 December 9, 2008

dispensations where they could have a teacher rather than a full-time administrator. He doesn't hold on to a lot of hope, but administration is grasping at every straw they can.

Mr. Nero noted that they have heard rumors about waivers state wide that everything is on the table and can be waived; nothing can be waived. They also heard that they may be putting a list of all the waiver requests throughout the state during the last couple of years. The bottom line is that the district will be asked for waivers on these things.

Mr. Archetto referred to No. 8 and asked who the coordinator was. Dr. Lundsten indicated that it was Audrey Romanelli who was the program supervisor and an ELL teacher. She came out of the teaching staff. She worked out of the Horton Program, and she would facilitate all the parent involvement pieces, placement issues, testing, home language surveys, and would sit at central registration when parents came in to see where they would best be served.

Mr. Stycos asked if there were other schools, other than Bain, where there is a staffing problem. Dr. Lundsten indicated that Cranston East could use some help in the content area subjects. Kristen Hlady added that in some of the lower incident elementary schools the students require forty-five minutes a day and are not getting that service. Those schools are relying on a teacher to go to their school for that service. Dr. Lundsten indicated that Garden City School is a low incident school with only a few youngsters requiring the service. Mr. Stycos asked if the parents are asked to transfer their child to another school, and Dr. Lundsten responded that they are asked; but

it is the parent's choice. Those recommendations are made, and Mr. Nero helps to find the appropriate placement.

With regard to the comments made about the PBGR process, Dr. Lundsten explained that the state is indicating that a student can no longer sit in a seat and get a grade. It is performance based by multiple measures. It is not simply tests. It could be a senior project, a portfolio, and it is performance based and not just a paper and pencil test.

3. Proposed Resolution - Format Changes to 2009-2010 Budget

Mr. Stycos indicated that he requested that this proposed resolution be placed on the agenda for the December 15th School Committee meeting. He stated that at several City Council meetings they have complained about the school department's budget, and he felt that the committee has to change the way they are doing things. They are not doing well with the City Council with regard to money. It is a matter than can be cited as a reason for the school department to be short-changed for funding. With this format that the Government Finance Officers' Association has recommended, they obviously know what they are doing. The committee needs to change the format of the budget so that it meets best practices, and hopefully makes the City Council happier.

Superintendent Scherza stated that he didn't want his remarks coming across to the committee that administration or the business office is reluctant or doesn't want to accommodate. He asked the committee to keep in mind that they have been hearing for some time about the common chart of accounts that will be put into place for next year at this time by the state in which all school districts will have to submit their budgets in the same format. His issue with having Mr. Balducci do everything right now, because it does fall directly on him, is that for one year he will make changes and then make additional changes for next year. The other issue is the time that it will take to do it. As the chart of accounts grows, they will grow substantially. The chart of accounts will grow substantially from approximately 2,000 accounts to 23,000 accounts which means they will grow by approximately 1000%. At the present time, he is in the midst of developing next year's budget collection and development. It would be very difficult for one year; if they have to get it done, they will. Next year they won't have a choice unless they do a parallel document for use next year.

Mr. Balducci stated that he knows the issue has been that the document is not reader friendly. He doesn't know if that is more perception than reality. He is of the opinion that full disclosure is the way to go. They did attempt in the past to prepare a more streamlined document, but then they were criticized that it was too

streamlined and that they should have more information in front of them for deliberation. They then went back to the old format. The committee can go on other school districts' websites and look at their budgets. Some are very summarized more so than this school district's is. The GFOA recommends certain suggestions. This district prepares an executive summary which is included with the budget document that highlights the major changes with the document. As the Superintendent mentioned, he didn't want to come across as not wanting to do it; it is a time factor, and because of the bigger picture with the state dictating how it should be done, he will have to change it next year. If anyone has questions on the budget, he is always prepared to answer their questions.

Mr. Lombardi referred to the state required budgeting presentation one year from now and asked if it was affecting Mr. Balducci in certain parts of his budget or would it make one uniform school budget for every school district. Mr. Balducci indicated that it will be one uniform school budget for all districts. Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway asked if it was a state requirement that everything be on line as well, and Mr. Balducci indicated that once everyone goes through a peer review to make sure that everything is being done correctly, then it is audited by an external auditor because that person has to be retrained because of the new format. It will be posted on the website so that anyone can go on the district information to see what is being spent in the third grade as an example.

Mr. Stycos stated that a budget has a lot of uses, and one of them is that it is a political document. The district has to do better with the City Council. Mr. Balducci said that one of the suggestions was to provide a personnel supplement which administration

Page 8 December 9, 2008

prepared for a City Council hearing. If someone wanted to see the Oak Lawn teacher account, it showed how many teacher positions were behind that amount, etc. He offered this as an additional exhibit to be used in deliberating the budget. He could do something similar to that.

Ms. Iannazzi stated that what she and Mr. Stycos were trying to achieve with this resolution is that it is a sign of good will to the incoming mayor and council. She suggested that prior to the meeting on December 15th, meet with mayor-elect Fung and council president-elect Lanni to see specifically what information they are looking for in a budget document and make sure that is specifically what Mr. Balducci uses in his budget that he prepares.

School Committee member-elect McFarland commented that there has been much improvement over the past couple of years much more so than the years past when she was on the City Council. The committee has come forward to make a presentation, which was never done in the past. The Superintendent has explained what is in

the budget. In years past, the budget was poorly copied. There has been a mass improvement. Every council person who comes on asks for additional documentation and searches for things that they don't understand. What administration has done for the past few years has educated the Council a lot more. It is a learning process to see what the school department does which is completely different from what is done on a municipal level.

4. School District's Proposed 403B Retirement Plan Program

Mr. Balducci stated that at a recent School Committee meeting the committee had a presentation by Gatekeeper who is now acting as the third party administrator for the district on managing the district's 403(b) program. This is a program offered to the employees who choose to have money withheld from their pay for retirement purposes. The IRS has come forth with a number of new regulations which is forcing more of the responsibility of managing and overseeing that program on the employers. In the past week, as the agent, the school district took the money out of the employee's paycheck and made sure it went to the investor provided in a timely fashion. One of the requirements is that the district now have a plan document. A copy of this document was distributed to the committee. It was prepared by Gatekeeper. A part of the plan is to have the plan document approved by the School Committee prior to January 1, 2009 when the new regulations go into effect. Gatekeeper

is an expert in the industry, and they prepared this document based on how they would prepare the document for all their other clients. He and Mr. Votto went through a question-and-answer-type form asking what should be in the plan document and what should not be in the plan document for school administration. They took their answers and crafted the plan document. One of the components of the document is to have a Benefits Plan

Page 9 December 9, 2008

Committee and suggested to have a representative of the School Committee, Superintendent or his or her designee, himself, and Mr. Votto as members of the committee. Beginning with the payroll of January 6, 2009, the school district will begin processing all the payroll withholdings with the new company.

II. Adjourn Public Work Session to Public Meeting

The public work session was adjourned to the public meeting at 7:08 p.m.

The roll was called. Mrs. Greifer was absent.

III. Executive Session Minutes Sealed – December 9, 2008

Moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously

carried that the December 9, 2008 Executive Session minutes remain confidential.

Chairman Traficante stated that no votes were taken in Executive Session.

IV. Adjournment

Moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Ms. Iannazzi and unanimously carried that the meeting be adjourned.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, it was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea M. Iannazzi

Clerk